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Using Animated Gifs to demonstrate Labour Force and Other Characteristics of Families

28 September 2011 • Posted by Michelle 6 comments

Updated: 16/11/2011 - [New Concept Added](#)

What?

Animated gifs are a simple and efficient means of displaying small animations and clips. While they have been superseded in recent years by streaming video, java, javascript and flash, animated gifs are still widely used and supported. They are particularly useful for displaying graphs and charts, as the file format is well suited for simple images with solid areas of colour and well defined edges.

This technique for data visualisation has been applied using a variety of chart types to the recently released estimates from Labour Force and Other Characteristics of Families (cat no. 6224.0.55.001). Refer to this publication for an overview of the data being presented.
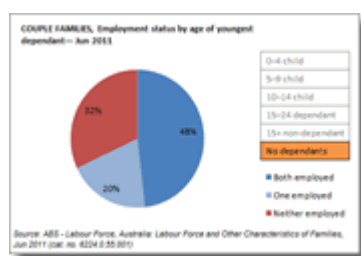
Why?

An animated graph or chart is particularly useful in visualising data across multiple dimensions. While a static graph is typically limited to two dimensions (x versus y), an animated graph allows for data to visually flow across a third dimension while still retaining a simplistic two dimensional view.

While more advanced scripting techniques, such as java, javascript and flash allow for greater user interaction with the data (such as pausing and rewinding), an animated gif can be set to cycle through a set loop and passively display animated information without waiting for any user input. If done appropriately, this can be used to enhance articles and commentary by adding a little dynamism to what would otherwise be a static page.
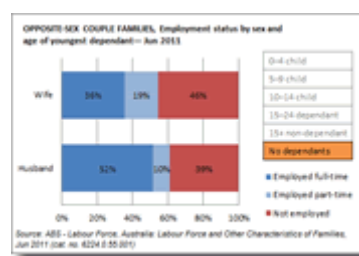
When?

This is currently proof of concept work. Your feedback on this development will determine it's success.
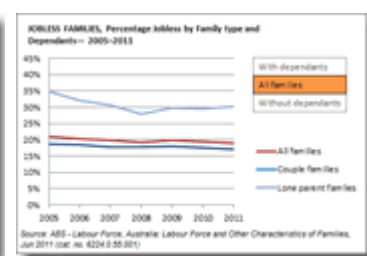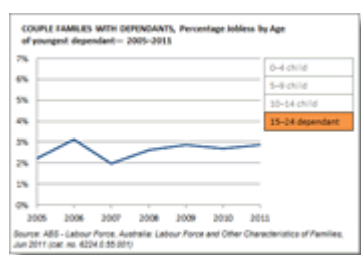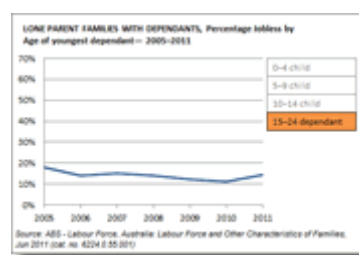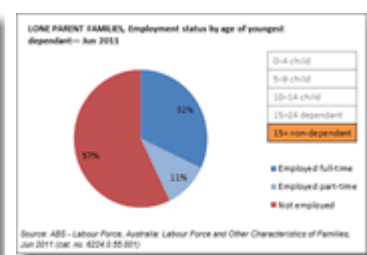
View Concept 1   View Concept 2   View Concept 3

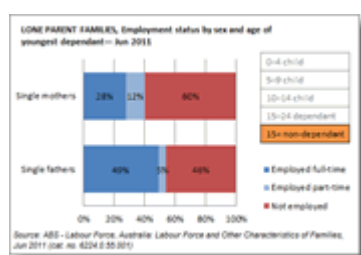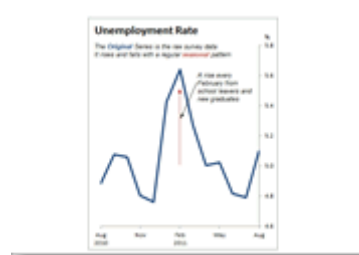View Concept 4   View Concept 5   View Concept 6

View Concept 7   View Concept 8

[animated gifs](#)

6 Comments

1. #1: Mike19/01/2012 18:17:55

   I think the feedback is good. Animated GIFs are a bad solution to a problem that doesn't exist, i.e.:

   1. No serious site wants content changing without reason.

   2. Animated GIFs do not allow relevant designer control.

   3. GIFs require licensing fees.

   4. Animated GIFs do not present consistently.

   5. Users need interactive control to interpret examples.

2. #2: Deidre18/11/2011 15:18:44

   I agree with the other posters, although the animation adds some interest to the data and feels more engaging, you do have the urge to click the categories for yourself so you can spend more time on some views. Also, this approach doesn't necessarily lend itself to comparison e.g. in concept 4 I would normally prefer to see all the lines on the graph at the same time so I could compare between them. It's a bit harder to do when you see only one line at a time. Good start at adding some interest though :)

3. #3: Scott11/11/2011 12:05:58

   These examples would certainly be enhanced by more interactive controls. Perhaps these kinds of graphs can be built into the current WCA web graph tools. The graphing templates that are currently available are rather limited and inflexible. For instance, I can't change from Husband/Wife to Mother/Father as shown in Concept 2. Pie charts are also not available, and yet suit this kind of data well.

   I have another animated gif example that may be more appropriate for this un-interactive format that I'll get up on another betaworks post shortly.

4. #4: David10/11/2011 09:29:20

   I think it is a good concept, and a good way of guiding a reader through a story. But at the same time, I think it's tricky to get the right timing for the animations.

   Looking at the examples, all I want to do it move my mouse over the categories to interact and look at the data in my own time. If I can't interact with the gif, then I find myself having to wait for a full animation cycle to look at a category that I am interested in, only to see it tick straight over to another category before I have fully appreciated what it is showing.

   So I guess that having a more interactive version of these graphs (nothing to

complex though) would make me feel more comfortable as a reader/user trying to take in the story.

5. #5: Scott 02/11/2011 11:16:54

Thanks for the feedback. This idea could certainly be developed into a more advanced interactive format with user controls, but I think that interactivity can sometimes be distracting from the story being told.

The beauty of displaying information in an animated gif is that it is really simple and versatile and can be set to guide users through a certain story to complement the text of an article without any demands on the user to hit play or fast forward/rewind - they can just passively sit back and watch the animation.

The trick is getting the balance right between too much or too little information, and animation speeds that are too fast or too slow. I think some of these examples are probably too detailed and cycle too fast, but the idea can be developed further to get the balance right.

6. #6: ac01/11/2011 11:40:29

Nice idea to have animated gif to tell a story. Pity that it's not allowing any user control of the speed of the animation.

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![Australian Bureau of Statistics]

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